

## Service and Survival: The clergy in late sixteenth-century Scotland

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The problem of staffing and financing the Reformed parish service after 1560 was an enormous one. To find over 1000 ministers able for the task would have taken a miracle.<sup>1</sup> The wonder is not that so few but that so many were found in the early years. The late-medieval Scottish church at parish level was on the whole a church of deputising subordinates – curates – who took their orders from above and provided an essential service for the parishioners. Material provision for this service – the teinds – had been diverted from the parishes over the years into the hands of absentee clergy, religious institutions and those who staffed them in the form of benefices which were regarded as property units by those who held them. Pastoral duties in the parishes from which these livings were derived were discharged by deputies. Exceptions to this rule included the houses of Augustinian canons-regular who were expected to take on parochial duties.<sup>2</sup>

The remuneration of the pre-Reformation parish workforce was on the whole small, the recommended minimum salary for a curate being £13 6s 8d, only a little more than a ploughman was usually paid. Comparison of clerical incomes can be made by comparing that of James Chisholm, whose Glasgow cathedral canonry was funded from the teinds of the Ayrshire parish of Tarbolton, which he leased to a tacksman for £160 a year, and the £7 6s 8d which he paid the vicar-choral who occupied his stall in the cathedral at services and the £20 which he paid to the curate of Tarbolton.<sup>3</sup> An appropriating institution

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<sup>1</sup> But on recruitment, see, J. Kirk, *Patterns of Reform, Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk* (Edinburgh, 1989), 96-153.

<sup>2</sup> M. Dilworth, *Scottish Monasteries in the Late Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1995), 70-1.

<sup>3</sup> G. Chalmers, *Caledonia* (Paisley, 1890), vi, 515-16.

such as a monastery might give a curate a contract of employment, with a salary and the use of the parish kirklands, as Paisley abbey did for William Hume curate at Auchinleck.<sup>4</sup> John Greenlaw, vicar of Cranston, made a contract with the curate Robert Acheson, paying him £20 a year, rather more than the minimum wage.<sup>5</sup> A private lay patron (there were not many of these left) might grant the benefice to the parish priest, especially if the latter also acted as his own chaplain and clerk, or was a relative. If the curate acquired an altarage or practised as a notary he could add to his basic income.

Curates were often moved around the parishes appropriated to a particular institution. A more significant feature of their working lives is the fact that, usually, once a parish priest always a parish priest. The man who learned his job by the apprenticeship method – there were no seminaries in medieval times – and became a curate, whether or not he enjoyed supplementary sources of income, appears to have rarely left the parish service. On the other hand, someone who with the necessary backing got hold of a benefice early in his career and went into, say, ecclesiastical administration, an academic post, legal practice or royal service, had a chance to climb the ladder of ecclesiastical preferment. There would thus appear to have been two streams of job-opportunity for clerics.

What may have saved many curates from real poverty was the fact that they were local men living in and serving the community to which they belonged, where friends and relatives might contribute to their support. The late-medieval Scottish church is sometimes accused of neglecting the parishes, and as far as material provision is concerned this seems to be a fair criticism. It appears that parish service was not seen as a work-option by most well-educated career churchmen – although it should just be mentioned that a university degree was not

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<sup>4</sup> J. C. Lees, *The Abbey of Paisley* (Paisley, 1878), cxviii.

<sup>5</sup> National Register of Archives [NAS], Edinburgh Commissariat, Register of Testaments [Edin.Tests], CC8/8/1 (30 March 1568).

essential to a career; there were many non-graduate priests well up in diocesan administration, for example.

At the eleventh hour concern among reformists at the Scottish provincial councils of the last decade before the Reformation, for improved standards among the clergy generally and the need to combat heresy, led to a proposed programme aimed at improving educational standards and the production of a Catechism – too little, too late as it turned out. The parish curate, from what is recorded of his activities, was probably doing his best, but neither his practical training nor work-experience equipped him to deal with the doctrinal attacks of the heretics. He was even told by his superiors to read the new Catechism to the parishioners “without commentary”.<sup>6</sup>

The difficulties facing those in the parish service after 1560 were considerable. The protestant pastor was asked to take on a teaching ministry. The scriptures were to be regularly expounded and the meaning of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper taught on those occasions when they were administered. Congregational discipline and church attendance were to be seen to be achieved. There were the usual pastoral duties, possibly some schoolmastering and, in most cases, the rearing of a family in the fear of the Lord, and as an example to the rest of the flock. Frequently, a minister had oversight of an additional parish or parishes, a device officially adopted in the 1570s in order to relieve staff-shortage but which had been in operation in some places a decade earlier.

There is no time here to look in detail about how the Reformed ministry was financed, except to say that the various attempts to tackle the problem took until the end of the century to produce something like adequate provision. Although there was a moral argument for transferring the revenues of the old kirk to those serving in the new, this simply could not be done. Practical attempts to make the ministers’

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<sup>6</sup> A. F. Mitchell, ed., *Catechism set forth by Archbishop Hamilton (1552); together with the Twopenny Faith (1559)* (Edinburgh, 1882).

stipends the first charge on the parish teinds met with difficulties and outright obstruction. Measures began in 1561 with the tax known as the Thirds of Benefices whereby existing benefice-holders kept two-thirds of their benefices for their lifetimes and handed over to government-appointed Collectors the remaining third which was then divided between the ministry and the crown.<sup>7</sup> Clergy who conformed and took service in the Reformed kirk were exempt from the payment of the Third. As time went on benefices were granted to serving ministers, as the old benefice-holders died or (after 1573) were deprived for refusal to subscribe to the Reformed Confession of Faith. Later still, benefices were detached from abbacies and granted to ministers of the previously appropriated parishes, thus reversing years of parochial deprivation.

None of these steps was taken without difficulty or opposition from benefice-holders and tacksmen of teinds who were reluctant to pay the Third and because of the crown's inroads into the kirk's allocation. The business of collection was itself complicated and slow, and left the vital matter of the kirk's provision in the hands of crown officials. The fact that the structure of the old kirk, based on the benefice system, was left in being gave a glimmer of hope to religious conservatives that the revolution might be reversed.

If life was going to be difficult for ministers, readers and their families, what was it like for those pre-Reformation clerics who survived well into the second half of the century, whom we shall call the "non-serving clergy"? Apart from those who may have abstained from service for conscience's sake, there must have been those who while accepting Protestantism felt themselves or were judged incapable of taking on the new demanding parish service. The higher beneficed clergy with the liferent of two-thirds of their livings should have been reasonably comfortable. Monks and nuns with the liferent of their portions and friars with their annual pensions of £16 payable by burgh

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<sup>7</sup> G. Donaldson, ed., *Accounts of the Collectors of the Thirds of Benefices, 1561-72* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1949), Introduction.



authorities probably got by, some more easily than others. However, what about the lower ranks of non-serving clergy? Those who had been inducted into a chaplainry as a minor benefice, often for life, were entitled to keep two-thirds of the income, but many mass-priests serving the great number of pre-Reformation altars were merely paid fees to do so, hired and moved on by the patrons, who in burghs were often the magistrates. The contrast can be seen in the fortunes of two of the chaplains in the burgh kirk of Ayr. The elderly sacrist sir Alexander Ker became the church officer at £10 a year from the common purse,<sup>8</sup> while sir Thomas Raith moved with his family to East Lothian where a sympathetic patron, the recusant Lord Seton, gave him the provostship of Seton collegiate church. In his will in 1582 Raith thanked his “kynd master ... in respect of his faithful dealing with me and my poor wife and bairnis...”.<sup>9</sup>

Generalisations are all very well, but it is illuminating to discover how the clergy fared as individuals, and as members of families and communities. For this, we turn to a major source of sixteenth-century social history, the Registers of Testaments. Here we find the everyday circumstances of those who died in the midst of their service, some at an advanced age, others in their twenties, and of those non-serving clergy who lived alongside them. A sample of 204 clergy testaments have been examined for the present purposes, comprising all those recorded in the commissary courts of St Andrews, Brechin and Edinburgh. These courts cover the areas of the Mearns, Angus, Fife, parts of Perthshire and the Lothians; the post-Reformation commissariat of Edinburgh had both a local and general jurisdiction which gives a good geographical spread across country including the west of Scotland, in some measure making up for the deficiencies of the commissariat of Glasgow records. Details of previous service and office-holding and other background circumstances have been taken from reference works

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<sup>8</sup> Carnegie Library, Ayr, Ayr Burgh Court Book, 1549-60, fo. 15v.

<sup>9</sup> Edin. Tests, CC8/8/11 (26 January 1581/2).

such as the medieval and post-Reformation *Fasti*, and from various legal records.

Personel represented are as follows:

Ministers and readers	84
Beneficed non-serving clergy	77
Unbeneficed non-serving clergy and chaplains	29
Members of religious orders	11
Schoolmasters	3
	<b>204</b>

One of the first things to strike us about the circumstances of the serving protestant clergy, to take them first, is the extent to which many of them moved around the parishes, in some cases four or five times in little more than a decade. In the 1570s when they were settled in one parish with the oversight of others the parish of settlement might change.<sup>10</sup> Besides, although the additional parishes might be contiguous the parish kirks might be quite far apart and involve a good deal of travelling. Relocation had its own problems. Apart from the flitting there was the uncertainty of what to expect on arrival. Elsewhere I have discussed the ministers' difficulty in getting possession of the manses and glebes which by the 1560s had often been leased or feued to someone else.<sup>11</sup>

Movement might be over considerable distances. Peter Watson, former canon of St Andrews priory, who began his ministry in Fife in the 1560s, was moved to Dumfries in 1574, with oversight of other three parishes. William Strang after 14 years at Kirkliston was moved to Irvine on the Ayrshire coast in 1583 as an assistant to the minister in a parish which also had a reader. Especially mobile were William Laing who died while minister at Carnbee in 1583, who had served in five

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<sup>10</sup> F. D. Bardgett, 'Four Parische Kirkis to ane Preicheir' in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society [RSCHS]*, xxii (1986), 195-209.

<sup>11</sup> M. H. B. Sanderson, 'Manse and Glebe in the Sixteenth Century', in *RSCHS*, xix (1975), 81-92.

parishes in 18 years, George Lundie who served in four parishes in 17 years, always with other parishes in charge, and Thomas Cranston who served in seven parishes over 15 years. By contrast some pastors remained long in the same parish, like John Row with 20 years in Perth, or William Lamb who served at Coldingham for 20 years, who in his will exhorted the parishioners to order the kirkyard where he was to be buried “mair cumlie and decentlie than it hes bene in tyme bygane”.<sup>12</sup> Thomas Daill died in 1587 as minister at Stenton where he had begun as a reader in 1568.

Service might be fraught with danger as well as inconvenience. In 1599 Alexander Bruce minister at Slains, in recusant country protected by the earl of Erroll, was attacked on his way to the church.<sup>13</sup> Andrew Mylne, minister at Fetteresso, who was remembered by some as “a learned, honest, kynd man, very skilful and diligent”, so incurred the antagonism of William Douglas of Glenbervie that he had a watch set on his manse.<sup>14</sup> Alexander Keith, minister at Benhom, was slain in June 1594, perhaps caught up in local family disputes.<sup>15</sup> Peter Watson who died as minister at Flisk in January 1586 attempted in his will to put an end to a family feud by asking his wife and children to forgive “from the bottom of their hartis” the slaughter of his wife’s kinsman David Stanehouse on “the earnest suit and unfeigned repentance” of the two killers and to accept the *kinbut* – compensation money – from them.<sup>16</sup> Pastoral concern could scarcely come nearer to home than this.

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<sup>12</sup> NAS, Edin.Tests, CC8/8/14, p.142. Note: when the registers of testaments were digitised by NAS page numbers were substituted for folio numbers. Where my research was done on this source since digitisation I have given page numbers for quick reference, otherwise the date of recording is given as the reference within the volume.

<sup>13</sup> T. Mair, ed., *Narratives and Extracts from the Records of the Presbytery of Ellon, 1587-1800* (Peterhead, 1894), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Hew Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ [Fasti]* (Edinburgh 1915-), v, 464.

<sup>15</sup> NAS, Edin. Tests., CC8/8/31, p.798.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/15, p.226.

Ministers and readers had to confront the congregation's expectations in the quality of service, and the criticism of those who had in some cases been instrumental in their appointments. We have lost the records of the pre-Reformation rural deans who reported on the clergy's discharge of their duties, and we have precious little record of the findings of post-Reformation visitations, but just enough to show that high standards were expected. In 1586 the aged reader at Dollar, the former curate Robert Burn, was disciplined for his reported shortcomings: failure to read distinctly, allowing congregational discipline to lapse and for being "giffin to drunkines and intemperance". He denied the last two charges and excused the others "be ressoun off his greit aige and other infirmities".<sup>17</sup> One cannot help feeling sorry for the old man who by then had served the parishioners for over 40 years. One congregation complained that the minister read off his sermons from notes which he left in the pulpit between one service and the next. On the other hand there is evidence of good relations between parishioners and pastor. James Melville recorded how the parishioners at Anstruther laboured at the building of his manse – happily still standing – out of the love of their hearts.<sup>18</sup> Ayr Town Council gave poor relief to the widow and children of James Dalrymple, former chorister and lately minister, "for the ardent luf shown by the said James to the ...burgh".<sup>19</sup>

The greatest difficulty of all was that of having enough to live on. Stipends, partly in money and partly in victual, were due from various sources, even for one minister. John Knox's testament, for example, lists over 20 individuals, the tenants of two localities, the church at Haddington from which he had a pension and the Collector of the Thirds for Fife all of whom owed parts of his stipend.<sup>20</sup> Collection by the officers of the regional Collectors was slow and not without

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<sup>17</sup> J. Kirk, ed., *Visitation of the Diocese of Dunblane and other Churches, 1586-89*, (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 1984), 19.

<sup>18</sup> James Melville, *Autobiography and Diary* (Edinburgh, 1842), 5-6.

<sup>19</sup> Carnegie Library, Ayr, Ayr Town Council Minutes, 1546-60, fo. 6.

<sup>20</sup> NAS, Edin.Tests., CC8/8/2, 13 January 1572/3.



difficulty, delay and obstruction by reluctant debtors. Payment was frequently in arrears. Like other regular dues such as rents stipends were paid in two instalments a year, at Whitsunday and Martinmas but payment was not always prompt. Longstanding arrears of stipend were common with scores of individual benefice-holders, tacksmen and institutions failing to pay their Thirds for years. The laird of Bass in East Lothian owed the minister of Stenton four years' contribution.<sup>21</sup> Alexander Allardyce, minister at Ecclesgreg who died in 1588 was due over £300 from six different people.<sup>22</sup> Thomas Cranston minister at Libberton in Lanarkshire who died in 1585 was owed over £2,000, including £420 from one laird alone, of which he had received only one instalment in kind – a cow worth £6 13s 4d. The bailies of Selkirk owed him £200 for an earlier spell of ministry there, of which they had paid him only £15 after he had taken them to court.<sup>23</sup> In his *Introduction to the Accounts of the Collectors of the Thirds of Benefices* Gordon Donaldson reminded us that nothing at all was paid until November 1561 although many ministers and readers were in charges by then. Taking on the Reformed parish service was a real challenge in more senses than one.

When we wonder how the ministers survived in this uncertain situation we have to remember that at that time everyday commodities and services were rarely paid for on receipt or bills paid on the nail – although cautious suppliers might take bonds for payment, the debtor then being liable for interest if payment was not made in time. For much of the time everybody owed something to somebody. Nevertheless, the family in the manse had to eat and there was a limit to how much could be grown on the glebe since some of that had to provide pasture for the minister's horse, the equivalent of his travelling expenses.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/17, p. 246.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/818, p. 356.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/18, p. 404.

However, the hardship could not have been unexpected. Quite apart from the practical difficulties of collecting and distributing the Thirds it was well-known that non-payment of teinds had been an endemic problem long before “the uproar for religion”, which had caused very many pre-Reformation clergy to lease the teinds, thus passing on the problem of collection to tacksmen, who were often local lairds.

The records of the Court of Session are full of actions (often futile) against debtors for non-payment of teinds or tack-duty for teinds that had been leased.<sup>24</sup> The testaments of non-serving clergy after 1560 reveal the extent to which their incomes, like the stipends of ministers and readers, were in arrears, which partly explains why many of them were slow to pass on their Thirds to the Collectors. Some of them had been waiting for their teinds for years. Alexander Dick, archdeacon of Glasgow, who died in 1560 was due some of his since 1555. In his testamentary inventory the exact amount owed by individual debtors is substantiated by reference to failed court actions and ecclesiastical “cursings”; neither church nor civil court had been successful in pursuing his debtors.<sup>25</sup> Francis Bothwell, parson of Stronsay, was due 10 years’ arrears of payment from several tacksmen.<sup>26</sup> John Laing, parson of Luss, was due over £400, a debt of four years’ standing, from the laird of Luss.<sup>27</sup> Archibald Beaton, commissary of Glasgow, who died in 1582, was due over £1600 from 1573 onwards.<sup>28</sup> Henry Lumsden, parson of Tannadice, who was owed teinds of over £200 from a long list of debtors when he died in 1570, was a survival of Cardinal Beaton’s administration.<sup>29</sup> Most of these men were cathedral canons who belonged to influential families.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Gavin Hamilton, commendator of Kilwinning, against parishioners of all parishes appropriated to the abbey, 1558-9; NAS, Register of Acts and Decrees, CS7/22, fos. 102v-167v.

<sup>25</sup> NAS, Edin.Tests., CC8/8/4, 9 June 1576.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/3, 4 December 1574.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/2, 27 October 1572.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/13, 5 February 1583/4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/8, 10 August 1570.

Besides the fruits of their benefices many pre-Reformation clerics drew pensions from various sources. These had sometimes been granted for special services but very often they were a by-product of the competitive appointments-system by which a rival claimant was bought off with a pension charged on the successful applicant's benefice. A pension might also be granted as a "golden handshake" to a benefice-holder when he resigned in favour of someone else. Payment of pensions like that of the teinds fell into arrears. Mr Gilbert MacMath, vicar of Kirkliston, and Mr Robert Auchmuty, vicar of Stirling, had served Cardinal Beaton as almoner and granter respectively. MacMath had a pension from the archbishopric of St Andrews which had not been paid for 13 years when he died in 1569.<sup>30</sup> Auchmuty's pension which was charged on Arbroath abbey revenues was also considerably in arrears when he died in 1587.<sup>31</sup> Financial problems dating from both before and after the Reformation are recorded in the settling up of his affairs by Robert Welsh, ex-canon regular of Holywood and reader at Tynron in Nithsdale, who died in 1568. He contested the tacksman's handing over to the Collector of Thirds of £24 13s 4d "quhilk third I had allowit in my stipend for reading at my awin kirk". At the same time he admitted a longstanding debt of £14 which he had borrowed from Robert Edgar, burgess of Dumfries, for expenses "at my first mass"; he urged his executors to repay it promptly "in respect he hes wantit the samyn lang".<sup>32</sup> The financial repercussions of the Reformation changes can be easily overlooked.

How did the former members of monastic communities fare in the second half of the sixteenth century?<sup>33</sup> On the whole life had become

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/1, 19 May 1569.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/18, 1 August 1587.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/1, 18 November 1569.

<sup>33</sup> For the service of former monks in the Reformed church, see M. Dilworth, 'Canons Regular and the Reformation' in *The Renaissance in Scotland*, ed. A. A. MacDonald and M. Lynch (1994), 164-82; 'Monks and Ministers after 1560' in *RSCHS*, xviii (1974), 201-21; *Scottish Monasteries in the Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1995), 75-88.

less communal in the decades before the Reformation, although monks did still share a common fund as well as receiving their portions, in a mixture of victual and money which included “habit siller”, clothing allowance. They tended to live in individual chambers, each with its own yard. They were dependent for payment of these allowances on the tenants of those lands earmarked for the purpose and on the goodwill of the monastic superior to see that the payment was made. Even before the Reformation, monks are found suing debtors in court; those of Melrose abbey sued the tenants of Gattonside and Darnick for arrears of their portions in November 1557.<sup>34</sup> In the decades following the Reformation there was a flood of court actions in which members of religious orders sued superiors and others for arrears of allowances which in terms of the Reformation-settlement they were entitled to for life. The canons regular of Holyrood, Cambuskenneth and Inchmahome sued their commendators in 1564.<sup>35</sup> As residence in the monastery was made a condition of entitlement pursuers had to explain why they had left the place; the canons of Holyrood stated that they could no longer live in their quarters which had been “cassin doun and destroyit”, although William Hislop one of the canons was managing to live there in the early 1570s. As late as 1602 John Bryce, one of the last survivors of the community at Crossraguel sued the earl of Cassillis, feuar of the abbey lands, for failure to honour his obligation to pay the monastic portions; the earl by then owed the old man over £700 which the court charged him to pay, with legal expenses in consideration of “the great aige and waiknes of the said dene John”.<sup>36</sup> Mark Ker, commendator of Newbattle, who wanted to turn the monastic buildings into a mansion house, treated the monks most shabbily of all, evicting them in 1560, and according to them “wald nevir gyf thame worth ane penny to leif upoun”.<sup>37</sup> He very reluctantly obeyed the court’s order to pay them, and

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<sup>34</sup> NAS, Register of Acts and Decreets, CS7/16, fo. 63.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, CS7/28, fo. 355; CS7/29, fos. 186, 452.

<sup>36</sup> J. Fergusson, *The White Hind* (London, 1963). 59-60.

<sup>37</sup> J. H. Burton and D. Masson, eds., *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, first series, 1545-1625, (Edinburgh, 1877-98), i. 228.



when sending in his returns to the Collector of Thirds he duly deducted £240 from his income for the portions of “sex aigit, decraipit and recantit monkis”.

William Abercrombie, former prior of Scone, acting head of the community under the commendator Patrick Hepburn, bishop of Moray, died in his chamber at Scone in 1577, although he had also rented a room in Perth from time to time. All he possessed were his few household goods and clothes. He had leased his monk's yard for £4 a year. His portion was several years in arrears, but his own debts were modest, mainly to Perth craftsmen. His will was witnessed by the minister of Perth.<sup>38</sup> It must have been a comparatively quiet life for the prior after the upheavals of the late 1550s, the burning of the monastery in 1559 and the tussels with the worldly-minded commendator over the property.

Michael Chatto, monk of Kelso, died in that town in 1576, also leaving only a few personal belongings. Although he too was due several years' arrears of portion he himself was not in debt, thanks to the support of his relatives who lived in Kelso. His will was witnessed by the reader there, Adam Clerk.<sup>39</sup> John Mure, monk of Crossraguel, died at Maybole in 1585 in much more comfortable circumstances in spite of the fact that Cassillis owed him arrears of his portion. He left over £100 in ready money, some of it in gold, and had lent money to a long list of relatives, friends and remaining monastic colleagues.<sup>40</sup>

Former nuns faced the same problems of subsistence as their male colleagues. In March 1557 the queen regent had granted a portion of North Berwick nunnery to Katherine Drummond, the blind daughter of the queen's trumpeter James Drummond, which the prioress Margaret Hume had not paid by 1561 when Katherine took her to court.<sup>41</sup> Clare Napier, a nun of Eccles, who sued the prioress in 1564 for non-payment of her portion for 10 years had left the monastery to live with relatives

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<sup>38</sup> NAS, Edin.Tests., CC8/8/6, 5 June 1578.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/8, 10 June 1580.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/14, p.559.

<sup>41</sup> NAS, Register of Acts and Decrees, CS7/22, fo. 145v.

and had contracted debts.<sup>42</sup> Marion Scott from the same community who sued the prioress in 1565 claimed not to have been paid her portion since 1547.<sup>43</sup> Margaret Cockburn who sued Janet Livingston, prioress of Manuel, also in 1565, claimed to have been professed 20 years earlier, “input thereintill in hir minoritie be her freindis [relatives] with greit soumes of money”, and to have had her portion and chamber withheld for the past two years.<sup>44</sup> Alison Ramsay, a nun at Haddington, alleged that the prioress Elizabeth Hepburn had ignored an earlier court order of 1553 to pay her “meit and drink” allowance. It was counter-claimed by the prioress that Alison had refused to return to the monastery in April 1559 when the English were in the town.<sup>45</sup> Katherine Simpson from Sciennes monastery claimed to have lived there for 40 years “befoir the putting forth of her in [the] trublous tyme”, and still claimed her portion in 1565 from the prioress Christian Bellenden.<sup>46</sup>

Prioresses themselves faced difficulties after 1560. In 1575 the king’s advocate raised an action in the Court of Session against Elizabeth Pringle, prioress of Coldstream, calling for her to be deprived of her benefice on the grounds that in defiance of the act of conformity of 1573 she had neither subscribed the Confession of Faith nor attended communion. Her advocate Henry Kinross alleged that she had done so and she was allowed to call witnesses. The case, like many others, disappears from the court record before a decision was reached, but the depositions of the witnesses have survived among the court papers.<sup>47</sup> We know that the prioress did keep her benefice so we can assume that the evidence of the witnesses who said they had seen her at communion was accepted. The prioress who succeeded her aunt Janet Pringle in

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, CS7/32, fo. 99.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, CS7/34, fo. 264.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, CS7/36, fo. 102v.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, CS7/27, fo. 280.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, CS7/31, fo. 373v.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, CS7/59, fo 442v; CS7/62, fo. 246; CS7/65, fos. 201-02; NAS. Court of Session Processes, CS15/17/1-7.

1566 (by which time the benefice had lost all religious functions) was the daughter of Sir John Pringle of that Ilk.<sup>48</sup> Her great-aunt Isabella, an earlier prioress, was once referred to by an English agent as “one of the best and assured spies we have in Scotland”. All evidence given at the trial was not in Elizabeth’s favour: one witness alledged to have seen her in company with her aunt Janet and four other nuns – Janet Shaw, Helen Riddle, Janet Kinghorn and a younger Elizabeth Pringle – attending mass in the nunnery kirk at Coldstream as late as 1564, although he noted that the nuns had then been wearing secular dress. According to another witness it was her uncle Mr Robert Pringle, a prebendary of Crichton collegiate church and minister at Coldstream in the early 1560s, who had encouraged her “to the casting off of hir habeit and cuming to the prayaris in Stow kirk quhair the deponar [witness] saw hir sing the psalms divers tymes”. He could not remember having seen her at communion. Another man swore that he had seen her there when communion was dispensed by her uncle Mr Robert Pringle. He had seen the minister hand the bread and then the wine to her and her brothers while the witness himself stood with those who were waiting to communicate at the second table. She was also seen at communion at Maxton; once when it was dispensed there by Mr Alexander Clayhills the minister from Jedburgh, when she sat “at the heid of the burd” next to the lady of Littledean. She was also seen at communion at Heriot when again her uncle had officiated, “dyvers gentilwomen of Borthwick” and some local tenants sitting at the Lord’s Table with her.

In a similar case against Margaret Hume, prioress of North Berwick, the minister Thomas MacGhie testified that she had given her confession of faith and “communicat ... in the presence of the haille parishionaris”.<sup>49</sup> One North Berwick man who said he had attended the kirk “sen the begynning of the religioun” agreed with the minister, saying that “he had been at the tabill with hir sindrie tymes”. The

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<sup>48</sup> C. Rogers, ed., *Chartulary of the Cistercian Abbey of Coldstream* (Grampian Club, London, 1879) for biographical details of the prioresses.

<sup>49</sup> NAS, Court of Session Processes, CS 15/17/5.

witnesses gave an interesting picture of the early days of Reformed worship: the preaching, prayers and congregational psalm-singing, the people sitting around the communion table, others waiting to take their turn, ministers travelling to different churches to administer the Lord's Supper, and people attending communion in different places. One Coldstream witness explained that he had gone to Heriot to see how things were done at the communion there before attending for the first time at his own church.

There is only one nun's testament in our sample, that of Euphemia Leslie, last prioress of Elcho, who died in Perth in September 1570. She left a modest inventory of household goods including a few silver items. She owed four years' Thirds to the Collector. She made her nephew and a Perth burgess her executors and left money to two women servants and some young relatives, with meal to be distributed to the poor. To a former chaplain sir Alexander Cook she left her English Bible. She was able to write, subscribing her will with her own hand.<sup>50</sup> It is clear that former members of religious orders while they may have been better treated than their English counterparts could not avoid hardship. Some nuns got married, others entered what was virtually the servant class. Margaret Hepburn, former nun of Sciennes, went to live with the Ramsays of Dalhousie where she was employed "to lerne and instruct [the laird's] bairnis and freindis and to do sic necessair effaris in schewing and uthirwayis ... of the place".<sup>51</sup>

In the struggle to survive one of the most common short-term solutions, for clergy as for others, was to borrow money. One third of the clergy whose testaments have been examined borrowed, half of whom served in the Reformed church. Some borrowings were small amounts for immediate needs but others were of quite large sums. Even James Boyd post-Reformation archbishop of Glasgow borrowed £32 to

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<sup>50</sup> NAS, Edin. Tests., CC8/8/2, 20 December 1570. For Elizabeth Leslie's dispute with the prioress of Elcho over her own appointment, see J. Finlay, *Men of Law* (East Linton, 2000), 125-7.

<sup>51</sup> NAS, Edinburgh Commissariat, Register of Decrees, CC8/2/25, 30 July 1594.



pay the apothecary who attended him in his last illness. John Greenlaw, vicar of Cranston, borrowed money to pay his Third to the Collector.<sup>52</sup> Some clergy with a little surplus might lend at interest to others, the highest lenders being surviving pre-Reformation benefice-holders. Sir David Barchane, vicar of Suddy and Kilmure, took a silver chalice from the vicar of Croy in pledge for a loan.<sup>53</sup> We might wonder how much former church silver had been stowed away for a rainy day such as this. Sir George Cunningham, a priest living in Glencairn parish in very poor circumstances in 1590, had loaned over £114 to a number of people; their failure to repay him no doubt contributed to his poverty.<sup>54</sup>

A safer source of income lay in the land. A parochial benefice brought land with it: land attached to the parish kirk which might be leased or feued or, if the incumbent so wished, farmed directly with the help of servants or paid labourers. Some major benefice-holders were virtually lairds, who employed factors, ground officers and the labour services of tenants; men like George Duff, provost of Cullen collegiate church, Robert Crichton, parson of Sanquhar, a canon of Glasgow cathedral, and Alexander Dunbar, dean of Moray, ancestor of the Dunbars of Burgie, son of a pre-Reformation dean, who feued land from Kinloss abbey and the bishopric of Moray. In this way clerical dynasties merged into the ranks of the landed gentry, some of them into the nobility; that of Mark Ker, whose descendants became Lords Newbattle, earls of Ancrum and eventually Marquesses of Lothian, is a good example.

Farming on a smaller scale involved a number of clergy families, mostly non-serving clergy, whose inventories of plough oxen, cattle and sheep and the usual grain crops put their operations on the scale of those of tenant farmers and small proprietors. The vicar of Suddy already mentioned bequeathed his best plough oxen to his son. Jerome Spens an Elgin chaplain and vicar of Alves and exhorter there rented land around

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<sup>52</sup> NAS, Edin. Tests., CC8/8/1, 30 March 1568.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/1, 16 November 1569.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/22, p. 442.

Elgin and farmed his vicar's croft at Alves where he paid a ploughman and four labourers.<sup>55</sup> The question arises whether these clergy had found it necessary to turn to farming to augment their uncertain (and reduced) incomes after 1560 or whether, as seems likely, they had always fitted naturally into rural society.

The testaments of only nine ministers, one exhorter and one reader in our sample of 204 clergy show evidence of actual farming. They appear late in the sixteenth century or early in the seventeenth, by which time an increasing number of ministers were acquiring vacant benefices and the land that went with them. Thomas Cranston leased several acres near his kirk at Tranent. William Clerk, minister at Anstruther, rented land from the local laird and traded a barrel of herring with a shipmaster. Alexander Keith at Benholm had no fewer than 20 oxen besides other stock on different holdings leased from the earl Marischal. John Fullarton at Inverkeilor had a long list of tenants.

In addition to present needs there was the question of how to provide for the family's future. Of the 204 clergy whose testaments have been examined 85 were married, 59 of them being serving ministers or readers with 26 non-serving clergy. There are also 18 references to natural sons and daughters of the non-serving clergy who had to be provided for. In the case of ministers the problem of future provision for their children was taken seriously by the framers of the First Book of Discipline: "we judge it a thing most contrarious to reason, godliness and equity that the widow and children of him who in his life did faithfully serve the kirk of God, and for that cause did not carefully make provision for his family, should after his death be left comfortless of all provision". It was almost 200 years, however, before a proper scheme was set up for this purpose and meantime the best the family could expect was a moral claim on poor relief from the kirk session or town council. Like the majority of women, ministers' widows commonly remarried, often taking another minister as second husband, in some cases their late husband's successor.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/6, 18 March 1578/9.

Many clergy, however, did try to make provision from the available resources, adopting means used by countless other fathers. Those who possessed land (other than the parochial lands which passed to their successors) bequeathed their right to it, or part of it, to children and other dependants, commonly reserving the liferent to the widow until she remarried – stepfathers in all walks of life had to be kept at a distance from the children's inheritance if possible. Money bequests were usually earmarked to be "laid out on land" or in purchasing annualrents from land or burgh property – money was not bequeathed to be spent. Sometimes it was set aside for a son's education or a daughter's *tocher*. Children were legally entitled to their *bairn's pairt*, that is an equal share of one third of the late parent's moveable goods, but many parents if they could afford to do so substituted a greater sum for the bairn's pairt, or settled a sum on a child during their lifetime in lieu of the bairn's pairt when they died.

Family relations could not always be expected to run smoothly. Ninian Young minister at Monkton left his wife in charge of the children's affairs, as many fathers did, adding "and scho to be respectit as scho handellis the bairnis".<sup>56</sup> Some ministers called on the support of a patron to see that the family survived. Peter Watson, minister at Flisk, recalled how "his good maister my lord Rothes has shown himself kindly to him in many things, especially in promoting him above others of his [Rothes'] freindis to the benefice of Flisk". He asked the earl to take his son John into his service and if John be found qualified, to present him to the benefice in his turn. Social ties and the advantages and responsibilities that went with them carried on whatever the outward changes in the parish service.

The ties that had long surrounded the higher beneficed clergy continued: their roles of patron, provider and protector of the interests of a wide circle of extended family. This is epitomised in the will of Mr David Gibson, parson of Ayr, a canon of Glasgow cathedral, who died

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/31, p. 578.

in 1568.<sup>57</sup> One of his executors was Mr Henry Gibson a prominent lay notary in Glasgow whom he also made tutor to his natural children David and Margaret. David was left £100 and income from his father's burgh property "to sustain him honestlie at the scholes [university] until his perfect aige". Margaret received £100 towards her marriage to "ane honest partie as soon as scho is hable". He also left £20 to the children's mother for her marriage after his death. He made many bequests to relatives, servants, godchildren and to each vicar-choral of the cathedral still living in Glasgow, and to a priest sir John Tod "to pray for me". Memories of how things had used to be arranged echo in the will of Mr Alexander Dick, dean of Glasgow, which he wrote during the sitting of the Reformation parliament: if his stepbrother's son John Abercrombie were to succeed him in his benefice "as wes devisit" he should have a silver mazer, his scarlet gown and other vestments.<sup>58</sup> Many ex-chaplains and other lower clergy were living with relatives after 1560, often in humble circumstances. Post-Reformation readers, whose work was part-time eked out by other jobs, were also among the less well-off. James Thrift, reader at Collace, was described as "ane puir man [who] had na gudis nor geir except £40 awand to him".<sup>59</sup> Sir William Greg, former priest and reader at Auchtermoonie, was described as "ane puir man, had nayther labouring occupatioun, guidis nor geir, onlie insicht [household plenishing]" worth 20 shillings.<sup>60</sup> The minister of Wigtown called James Falconar the reader there his "servant", bequeathing him some clothes and "samony as he plesis of all his bukis". He asked his executors to "help and stand gude" to the reader, "in all righteous lesum [lawful] and godlie [legal] actionis for the sake of the blessing of almighty God".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/2, - January 1569/70.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/4, 9 June 1576.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/2, 22 June 1584.

<sup>60</sup> NAS, St Andrews Commissariat, Register of Testaments [St And. Tests.], CC20/4/3, 2 March 1595/6.

<sup>61</sup> NAS, Edin. Tests., CC8/8/5, 4 February 1576/7.



The mention of books brings us to a feature of these testaments which may throw a little light on the spiritual life of these men. William Strang, the Irvine minister, included “the use of good books” among the influences on his own early spiritual development. There were 64 book-owners among our 204 clergy: 45 ministers and readers and 19 non-serving clergy. In many cases the books are not valued separately but simply valued with the household goods. Titles are given only occasionally, usually when the volumes were bequeathed. Most collections of books which were separately valued were worth between £20 and £30, about the price of a good plough ox. This puts into perspective the few more extensive libraries valued: those of Patrick Gillespie, minister at Stirling, Alexander Keith at Benholm, David Ferguson at Dunfermline and Adam Johnston at Crichton all of whose books were valued at £100; those of John Knox, “alsweill upoun the scripturis as uthyr prophane authoris”, valued at £130; those of Philip Hislop at Inveresk valued at £133 6s 8d; Henry Leitch at Auchtermuchty who had no fewer than 260 books in all (no titles, unfortunately) worth £140; James Lawson, ex-minister at Edinburgh who died in London, whose “haill buikis and cairtis [maps]” were worth £300; Thomas Buchanan, minister at Ceres, whose books were also worth £300, and those of his nephew and successor Robert Buchanan valued at £700, which may have included those of his uncle.

Books were sometimes bequeathed to family members and as in most families tastes in reading might vary. David Ferguson, minister at Dunfermline, left his son William all his “haill naturall historicall buikis and Scottis Cronicle”, selecting an English and a Latin Bible as the religious titles to be set aside for his heirship goods. He left his theological books to his sons-in-law, Mr David Spens, Mr John Row and David Ramsay but he asked the first two men to pay David Ramsay his share in money, “because the saidis buikis cannot be profitabill to him”.<sup>62</sup> Arthur Fethie, minister at Inverkeilor, left his books to his son James, asking him to allow his brothers the use of them. He left a friend

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/32, p. 410.

his “Martyr upoun the Kings”.<sup>63</sup> James Maxwell, minister at Holywood, left his father his “book of Erasmus”.<sup>64</sup> John Row, minister at Perth, when leaving his oldest son James all his books, also requested that the younger sons have the use of them, giving James a receipt for any they borrowed.<sup>65</sup> Thomas Liston, ex-Dominican friar of St Andrews, left a friend his English Bible.<sup>66</sup> James Boyd, archbishop of Glasgow, and John Douglas, archbishop of St Andrews, left books to the college of Glasgow and St Mary’s college, St Andrews respectively.

Book titles are given in the case of Thomas Cranston, minister at Tranent: Calvin on Genesis and on Isaiah and on “the haill new testament”, Bullinger “thereon” (new testament ?), Musculus’s “Common Places”, an ecclesiastical History (no author) and a “Cosmographia Munsteri”. Besides these he had on loan from William Sanderson, minister of Whittinghame, a volume of Calvin “upoun the prophettis and uthir twa little volumes ... he hes of myne ane volume of Harrie Bullinger against the Anabaptists... I have in lane of the parson of Haugh [George Hepburn, minister at Prestonkirk] Musculus upoun Matthew and upoun John, and he hes of myne John Calvin upoun the Acts of the Apostles, and John Brand [minister, Canongate] hes ane volume of myne upoun (?)Elay the propheit”.<sup>67</sup> Thomas MacGibbon (or MacGregor), minister at Monedie, had also loaned extensively to friends; the wife of one of them had passed on his Greek dictionary to a third party. He had also left some books in pledge with friends for loans. His library included not only Calvin’s *Institutes* and commentary on Exodus, a commentary on Genesis by Musculus and a Hebrew grammar, but classical authors including Cicero, Pliny, Virgil and Ovid.<sup>68</sup> William Lamb, minister at Coldingham, left a catalogue of his books (now missing) “to be valued by my trustie and faithfull

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<sup>63</sup> NAS, St And. Tests., CC20/4/5, 8 June 1615.

<sup>64</sup> NAS, Edin. Tests., CC8/8/20, p.381.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/8, 22 November 1580.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/12, 23 October 1583.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/1, 20 October 1569.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/31, 4 February 1597/8.

brethyrene Mr William Sanderson, David Hume, John Clapperton and Mr Patrick Gaittis, that pure brethyrene that hes not the lyk, nother silver to by thame may haif sum refreshment thereintill".<sup>69</sup> Sometimes books were to be sold. William Kirkpatrick, ex-monk and first minister at Kilwinning, asked that his books be sold to pay for his son's expenses at university.<sup>70</sup>

The preambles to many sixteenth-century testaments carry a confession of faith which, with certain reservations, can help us in our search for evidence of religious belief. I have discussed this subject in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> In the case of the clergy only 25 out of the 204 testaments examined carry such a confession, which may seem surprising, although, of course, these statements only occur where the person made a will. Sometimes it is simply stated that the testator gave a confession of his faith and assurance of salvation in the presence of friends or colleagues, without reproducing his actual words. Those that are quoted mostly contain a clear statement of essential belief in salvation through faith in the death and merits of Christ alone, hope of resurrection of the body and (in a few cases) assurance of election. Some affirmed their adherence to the Reformed kirk and one or two asked for a simple burial without ceremony. Alexander Dick, archdeacon of Glasgow, who died during the last session of the Reformation parliament and John Mure, one of the last monks of Crossraguel abbey who died in 1585, both expressed their faith in traditional Catholic terms, leaving their souls to God, the Virgin Mary and all the company [saints] of heaven. Thomas Daill echoed the sentiments of several others in thanking God "that had not only callit him from papistrie to the true professioun of the gospel but also of his greit mercie had made him (although of himself unworthie) to be ane

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/14, 14 January 1584/5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/9, 26 July 1581.

<sup>71</sup> M. H. B. Sanderson, *A Kindly Place? Living in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2002), chapter 10, " 'Surelie Persuaded', wills as evidence of religious belief in sixteenth-century Scotland".

minister in his kirk".<sup>72</sup> Mark Jamieson, vicar of Kilspindie, was equally positive: "I leave my soule to the mercie of God the Father, his son the Lord Jesus my only saviour and redeemer, in whom I acknowledge my redemptioun, electioun, justificatioun and glorificatioun to consist, apprehendit be ane lyvle faith throw the mercie of God and the Halie Spreit ... quha wirkis the assurance therof in my conscience".<sup>73</sup>

William Strang at Irvine and James Lawson, who died in exile in London, recalled early influences on their spiritual life. Strang remembered how from the age of about twelve God had shed "lycht in my hart with the knowledge of his truth", partly by reading and partly by hearing learned sermons. Lawson, Knox's successor at St Giles, also paid tribute to the early preachers, "especiallie since the tyme I did heir that notabill servant of God Mr Knox of blissit memorie...".<sup>74</sup> Those who will inevitably revise Knox's role in the Scottish Reformation should take into account the perception of contemporaries, and how the impact of his contribution lived in their memories. We are also reminded of the impression his preaching made on such different personalities as the teenage William Douglas of Lochleven, who called him "the instrument of the setting forth of thay glory",<sup>75</sup> and the student James Melville at St Andrews towards the end of Knox's life, when he took notes during the sermon "of such things as I could comprehend".<sup>76</sup> We may smile at but cannot entirely dismiss the unusual request in the will of Adam Foulis, minister at Heriot, who died in Edinburgh in 1573, the year after Knox, asking to be buried in Edinburgh kirkyard "besyd Johnne Knox sepulcure if it may be possible".<sup>77</sup>

Linlithgow

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<sup>72</sup> NAS, Edin. Tests., CC8/8/17, 11 April 1587.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/24, 13 November 1592.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, CC8/8/19, 24 August 1588.

<sup>75</sup> M. H. B. Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People, Life in Mary Stewart's Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1987), 56.

<sup>76</sup> James Melville, *Autobiography and Diary* (Wodrow Society, 1842), 26.

<sup>77</sup> NAS, Edin. Tests., CC8/8/3, 17 February 1574/5.